

Naum Ginsburg was born on April 8, 1912 in Zhitomir, Ukraine (near Kiev). His father, Boris Ginsburg, 1871 – 1938) was a pharmacist and his mother was Berta Kaabak Ginsburg (1883-1973). Before the revolution they were wealthy but after the October revolution Boris' pharmacy was taken away and the family had to separate for a few years as the father took a job in nearby Pulino. When Naum's sister (Manya Ginsburg Goldstein, 1910-1984) went to college, Berta and Naum rejoined Boris in 1927. In Pulino, Naum resisted the Komsomol by putting up protest flyers when the Komsomol tried to stifle Jewish customs by sending the Jewish children to work in the fields during Jewish holidays.

Naum came from a family of doctors and so he was determined to become a doctor as well. He attended medical school in Kiev from 1931 to 1936. Due to anti-Semitism, Jews were not allowed to pursue a PhD, so post-graduation, Naum got a job as a doctor working for the railroad in a small town (Old Oskol near Kursk]. Naum met his wife (Polyne (Paulina) Shmilkina, b 1913) in 1932 when she was also attending college in Kiev. They married in 1934 and had their first child, Isaac in 1936. They moved back to Kiev from Oskol in 1940 for Naum to attend graduate school but then the war broke out in 1941 and Naum volunteered to enlist in the army to fight fascism.

As a doctor Naum was designated an officer and was sent to the front lines assigned to a medical unit. He saw fighting in August 1941, near Krivoy Rog where the poorly organized Soviet army was defeated by the Germans. Naum became a Captain and chief of the combined 253rd and 99th division medical unit. In May of 1942 the German army trapped the Soviet 57th, 6th, half of the 9th, and the Pushkin tank corps near Kharkov. The Soviets were able to escape this trap by fighting across the Donetsk River but many people were killed. They retreated to Stalingrad where Naum witnessed many deaths. On March 2, 1943, after a long hard winter, the German army retreated. Naum was able to visit his family for the first time since the war started in 1944. Naum received several military medals which he still possesses (Order of the Red Star, Order of World War II of the First Level, two Medals for the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Berlin).

Naum's recounts liberating the Jews in Odessa. He saw both old and young Jews who were not killed because Odessa was occupied by Romanians, and unlike the Germans, the Jews could bribe them to stay alive. When the Soviets crossed into Poland near Lubin, they did not see any Jews, just the extermination camp at Maidanek. Naum stayed in the army after the war. Naum was stationed in Weimar from 1946-1948. He second son, Boris was born there in 1947. Weimar is near Buchenwald and Naum recounts how Germans would say they had nothing to do with the killings of the Jews.

In 1948, Naum, now a colonel, was assigned to a military hospital in Kiev to work as a therapist. Under Stalin, anti-Semitism was growing and Naum was fired and sent to another hospital in Dnepropetrovsk, in the Ukraine, while his family stayed in Kiev. Naum was fearful of the anti-Semitism in Dnepropetrovsk, so he asked to be moved to Kharkov in November of 1953. In Kharkov he was the chief of the therapy department until 1969. He got his PhD in 1962, and in 1963 he was awarded the Colonel of the Doctors of the Ukraine. Despite being a Russian hero, he and the extended family wanted to emigrate in 1976 because anti-Semitism (Isaac was fired from his job and the grandchildren were stymied). He could not apply to emigrate while he was in the military and his son Isaac worked for a military academy, but they applied as an entire family in 1987. They were quickly granted the right to emigrate and moved to the US on September 28, 1989 by way of Vienna, and Italy (for a month). The younger son Boris did not get a visa but later was able to emigrate to Israel which is where he lives now. Naum misses his friends and his job in Russia but appreciates the opportunity for his family and especially his grandchildren where they immediately were able to get jobs. He notes the difference between state sponsored anti-Semitism that existed in Russia vs the personal anti-Semitism that one might encounter in the US.